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Immanuel Kant

Little Journeys

TO THE HOMES OF

Great Philosophers

Kant

WRITTEN BY ELBERT HUBBARD AND DONE INTO A BOOK BY THE ROYCROFTERS, AT THEIR SHOP, WHICH IS IN EAST AURORA, NEW YORK, MCMIV

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THE canons of scientific evidence justify us neither in accepting nor rejecting the ideas upon which morality and religion repose. Both parties to the dispute beat the air; they worry their own shadow; for they pass from nature into the domain of speculation where their dogmatic grips find nothing to lay hold upon. The shadows which they hew to pieces grow together in a moment like the heroes in Walhalla, to rejoice anew in bloodless battles. Metaphysics can no longer claim to be the corner-stone of religion and morality. But if she cannot be the Atlas that bears the moral world she can furnish a magic defense. Around the ideas of religion she throws her bulwark of invisibility; and the sword of the sceptic, and the battering-ram of the materialist fall harmless on vacuity.

Lecture on THE SEARCH.

1833389

IMMANUEL KANT

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WE find that most men fit easily into types. You describe to me one Durham cow and you picture all Durham cows. So it is with men, they belong to breeds, which we politely call denominations, sects, or parties. Tell me the man's sect, and I know his dress, his habit of life, his thought. His dress is the uniform of his party and his thought is that which is ordered and prescribed. Dull indeed is the intellect which cannot correctly prophesy the opinions to which this man will arrive on any subject.

Durham cows are not exactly alike, I well know, but a trifle more length of leg, a variation in color, or an off-angle of the horn and that cow is forever barred from exhibition as a Durham. She is only fit for beef and the first butcher that makes a bid takes her, hide and horns.

Members of sects do not think exactly alike, but there are well defined limits of thought and action, beyond which they dare not stray lest the butcher bag them. In joining a sect they have given bonds to uniformity, and have signed their willingness to think and

act like all other members of the sect. ¶ Herbert Spencer deals with this "jiner" propensity in man, and describes it as a manifestation of the herding instinct in animals. It is a combination for mutual protection—a social contract, each one waiving a part of his personality, in order to secure a supposed benefit. A herd of cattle can stand against a pack of wolves, but a cow alone is doomed.

Few men indeed can stand against the pack. Wise are the many who seek safety in numbers! Think of those who have stood out alone and expressed their individuality, and you count on your fingers God's patriots dead and turned to dust.

The paradox of things is shown in that the entrenched many, having found safety in aggregation, pay their debt of homage to the bold few who lived their lives and paid the penalty by death.

Across the disk of existence, each decade, there glide five hundred million souls, and disappear forever in the dim and dusk of the eternity that lies behind. Out of the bare handful that are remembered, we cherish only the memories of those who stood alone and expressed their honest, inmost thought. And this thought is, always and forever, the thought of liberty. Exile, ostracism, death, have been their fate, and on the smoke of martyr fires their souls mounted to immortality.

Future generations often confuse these men with Deity, the Maker of the Worlds. And thus do we arrive

at truth by indirection, for in very fact these were the Sons of God, vitalized by Divinity, part and parcel of the Power that guides the planets on their way and holds the worlds in space. Upon their tombs we carve a single word: SAVIOR.

KANT was sixty years old before he was known to any extent beyond his native town; but so fast then did his fame travel that at his death it was recognized that the greatest thinker of the world had passed away. Kant founded no school; but Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Herde and Schopenhauer were all his children—and all but Schopenhauer showed their humanity by denouncing him, for men are prone to revile that which has benefited them most. Kant marks an epoch and all thinkers who came after him are his debtors. His philosophy has passed into the current coin of knowledge.

Kant's life-long researches revolve around four propositions:

I. Who am I?

II. What am I?

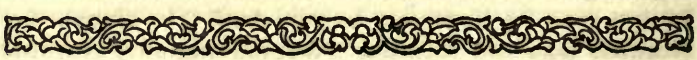
III. What can I do?

IV. What can I know?

The answer to Number Four is that I cannot know anything. That is to say, the wise man is the man who knows that he does not know. And this disposes of Number One and Number Two, leaving only Number

Three for our consideration. It took, however, a good many years and a vast amount of study and writing for Kant to thus simplify. For years he toiled with algebraic formulas and syllogistic theorems before he concluded that the best wisdom of life lies in simplification, not complexity.

"What can I do?" resolves itself into: "What must I do?" And the answer is: You must do four things in order to retain your place as a normal being upon this earth: eat, work, associate with your kind, rest. Just four things we must do, and outside of this everything is incidental, accidental, irrelevant and inconsequent. Then how to eat, work, associate and rest wisely and best constitutes life. Every man should be free to work out these four equations for himself, his freedom ending where another man's rights begin. To these four questions we should bring our highest reason, our ripest experience and our best endeavor. As for himself we know that Kant made a schedule of life which evolved a sickly boy into a reasonably strong man who banished pain, sorrow and regret from his existence and lived a long life of deep, quiet satisfaction, sane to the end, watching every symptom of approaching dissolution with keen interest, and at the last passing into quiet sleep, his spirit gliding peacefully away, perhaps to answer those two great questions which he said were unanswerable here, "Who am I?" "What am I?"



IMMANUEL KANT was born in 1724 at the City of Konigsberg, in the northeast corner of Prussia. There he received his education; there he was a teacher for nearly half a century, and there in his eightieth year he died. He was never out of East Prussia, and never journeyed sixty miles from his birthplace during his whole life. Prof. Josiah Royce of Harvard, himself in the sage business, and perhaps the best example that America has produced of the pure type of philosopher, says, "Kant is the only modern thinker who in point of originality is worthy to be ranked with Plato and Aristotle." Like Emerson, Kant regarded traveling as a fool's paradise, only Emerson had to travel much before he found it out, while Kant gained the truth by staying at home. Once a lady took him for a carriage ride, and on learning from the footman that they were seven miles from home he was so displeased that he refused to utter a single orphic on the way back, and further the story is that he never after entered a vehicle, and living for thirty years was never again so far from the lodging he called home.

In his lectures on physical geography Kant would often describe mountains, rivers, waterfalls, volcanoes, with great animation and accuracy, yet he had never seen any of these. Once a friend offered to take him to Switzerland so he could actually see the mountains, but he warmly declined, declaring that the man who was not satisfied until he could touch, taste and see

was small, mean and quibbling as was Thomas, the doubting disciple. Moreover he had samples of the strata of the Alps, and this was enough, which reminds us of the man who had a house for sale and offered to send a prospective purchaser a sample brick. ¶ Mind was the great miracle to Kant—the ability to know all about a thing by seeing it with your inward eye. "The Imagination hath a stage within the brain upon which all scenes are played," and the play to Kant was greater than the reality. Or to use his own words, "Time and Space have no existence apart from Mind. There is no such thing as Sound unless there be an ear to receive the vibrations. Things and places, matter and substance come under the same law, and exist only as mind creates them."

THE parents of Kant were very lowly people. His father was a day laborer—a leather cutter who never achieved even to the honors and emoluments of a saddler. There were seven children in the family and never a servant crossed the threshold. One daughter survived Immanuel, and in her eighty-fourth year she expressed regrets that her brother had proved so recreant to the teachings of his parents as practically to alienate him from all his relatives. One brother became a Lutheran minister and lived out an honored career; the others vanish and fade away into the mist of forgetfulness.

So far as we know all the children were strong and well excepting this one. At birth he weighed but five pounds, and his weakness was pitiable. He was the kind of a child the Spartans used to quickly make way with for the good of the state. He had a big bulging head, thin legs, a weak chest, and one shoulder was so much higher than the other that it amounted almost to a deformity.

As the years went by, the parents saw he was not big enough to work but hope was not dead—they would make a preacher of him! To this end he was sent to the "Fredericianium," a graded school of no mean quality. The master of this school was a worthy clergyman by the name of Schultz, who was attracted to the Kant boy, it seems, on account of his insignificant size. It was the affection of the shepherd for the friendless ewe lamb. A little later the teacher began to love the boy for his big head and the thoughts he worked out of it. Brawn is bought with a price—young men who bank on it get it as legal tender. Those who have no brawn have to rely on brain or go without honors. Immanuel Kant began to ask his school teacher questions that made the good man laugh.

¶ At sixteen Kant entered Albertina University. And there he was to remain his entire life—student, tutor, teacher, professor.

He must have been an efficient youth, for before he was eighteen he realized that the best way to learn is to teach. The idea of becoming a clergyman was at

first strong upon him; and Pastor Schultz occasionally sent the youth out to preach, or lead religious services in rural districts. This embryo preacher had a habit of placing a box behind the pulpit and standing on it while preaching. Then we find him reasoning the matter out in this way, "I stand on a box to preach so as to impress the people by my height or to conceal my insignificant size. This is pretense and a desire to carry out the idea that the preacher is bigger every way than common people. I talk with God in pretended prayer, and this looks as if I were on easy and familiar terms with Deity. Is it like those folks who claim to be on friendly terms with princes: If I do not know anything about God why should I pretend I do?"

This desire to be absolutely honest with himself gradually grew until he informed the Pastor that he better secure young men for preachers who could impress people without standing on a box. As for himself he would impress people by the size of his head, if he impressed them at all. Let it here be noted that Kant then weighed exactly one hundred pounds, and was less than five feet high. His head measured twenty-four inches around and fifteen and one-half inches over "firmness" from the opening of the ears. To put it another way he wore a seven-and-a-half hat.

It is a great thing for a man to pride himself on what he is and make the best of it. The pride of craftsman betokens a valuable man. We exaggerate our worth,

and this is Nature's plan to get the thing done. ¶ Kant's pride of intellect, in degree, came from his insignificant form, and thus do all things work together for good. But his bony little form was often full of pain, and he had headaches, which led a wit to say, "If a head like yours aches, it must be worse than to be a giraffe and have a sore throat."

Young Kant began to realize that to have a big head, and get the right use from it, one must have vital power enough to feed it.

The brain is the engine—the lungs and digestive apparatus the boiler. Thought is combustion.

Young Kant, the uncouth, became possessed of an idea that made him the butt of many gibes and jeers. He thought that if he could breathe enough, he would be able to think clearly, and headaches would be gone. Life, he said, was a matter of breathing, and all men died from one cause—a shortness of breath. In order to think clearly, you must breathe deeply.

We believe things first and prove them later; our belief is usually right, when derived from experience, but the reasons we give are often wrong. For instance, Kant cured his physical ills by going out of doors, and breathing deeply and slowly with closed mouth. Gradually his health began to improve. But the young man, not knowing at that time much about physiology, wrote a paper proving that the benefit came from the fresh air that circulated through his brain. And of course in one sense he was right. He related the incident of this

thesis many years after in a lecture, to show the result of right action and wrong reasoning.

The doctors had advised Kant he must quit study, but when he took up his breathing fad, he renounced the doctors, and later denounced them. If he was going to die, he would die without the benefit of either the clergy or physicians.

He denied that he was sick, and at night would roll himself in his blankets and repeat half aloud, "How comfortable I am, how comfortable I am," until he fell asleep.

Near his house ran a narrow street, just a half a mile long. He walked this street up and back, with closed mouth, breathing deeply, waving a rattan cane to ward away talkative neighbors, and to keep up the circulation in his arms. Once and back—in a month he had increased this to twice and back. In a year he had come to the conclusion that to walk the length of that street eight times was the right and proper thing—that is to say, four miles in all. In other words, he had found out how much exercise he required—not too much or too little. At exactly half past three he came out of his lodging, wearing his cocked hat and long, snuff-colored coat, and walked. The neighbors used to set their clocks by him. He walked and breathed with closed mouth, and no one dare accost him or walk with him. The hour was sacred and must not be broken in upon —it was his holy time—his time of breathing.

The little street is there now — one of the sights of

Konigsberg, and the cab drivers point it out as the Philosopher's Walk. And Kant walked that little street eight times every afternoon from the day he was twenty to within a year of his death, when eighty years old. ¶ This walking and breathing habit physiologists now recognize as eminently scientific, and there is no sensible physician but will endorse Kant's wisdom in renouncing doctors and adopting a regimen of his own. The thing you believe in will probably benefit you—faith is hygienic.

The persistency of the little man's character is shown in the breathing habit—he believed in himself, and relied on himself, and that which experience commended, he did.

This firmness in following his own ideas saved his life. When we think of one born in obscurity, living in poverty, handicapped by pain, weakness and deformity; never traveling; and then by sheer persistency and force of will rising to the first place among thinking men of his time, one is almost willing to accept Kant's dictum, "Mind is supreme, and the Universe is but the reflected thought of God."

KANT was great enough to doubt appearances and distrust popular conclusions. He knew that fallacies of reasoning follow fast upon actions, reason follows by slow freight. It is quite necessary that we should believe in a Supreme Power, but quite

irrelevant that we should prove it. ¶ Truth for the most part is unpopular, and the proof of this statement lies in the fact that it is so seldom told. Preachers tell people what they wish to hear, and indeed this must be so as long as the congregation that hears the preaching pays for it. People will not pay for anything they do not like. Hence, preaching leads naturally to sophistication and hypocrisy, and the promise of endless bliss for ourselves and a hell for our enemies comes about as a matter of course. What men will listen to and pay for, is the real science of theology. That is to say, the science of theology is the science of manipulating men. Success in theology consists in finding a fallacy that is palatable and then banking on it. Again and again Kant points out that a clergyman's advice is usually worthless, because pure truth is out of his province—unaccustomed, undesirable, inexpedient.

And Kant thought this was true also of doctors—doctors care more about pleasing their patients than telling them truth. "In fact," he said, "no doctor with a family to support can afford to tell his patients that his symptoms are no token of a disease—rather uncomfortable feelings are proof of health, for dead men don't have them." Most of the aches, pains and so-called irregularities are remedial moves on the part of nature to keep the man well. Kant says that doctors treat symptoms, not diseases, and often the treatment causes the disease, so no man can tell what proportion of diseases are caused by medicine and what by other forms

of applied ignorance. ¶ As for lawyers, our little philosopher considered them, for the most part, sharks and wreckers. A lawyer looks over an estate, not with the idea of keeping it intact, but of dissolving it, and getting a part himself. Not that men prefer to do what is wrong, but self-interest can always produce sufficient reasons to satisfy the conscience. Lawyers, being attaches of courts of justice, regard themselves as protectors of the people, when really they are the plunderers of the people, and their business is quite as much to defeat justice as to administer it. The evasion of law is as truly a lawyer's work as compliance with law. Then our philosopher explains that if law and justice were synonymous this state of affairs would be most deplorable, but as it is, no particular harm is worked, save in the moral degradation of the lawyers. The connivance of lawyers tames the rank injustices of law, hence, to a degree, we live in a land where there is neither law nor justice—save such justice as can be appropriated by the man who is diplomat enough to do without lawyers and wise enough to have no property. Justice, however, to Kant is a very uncertain quantity and he is rather inclined to regard the idea that men are able to administer justice as on a par with the assumption of the priest that he is dealing with God. Kant once said, "When a woman demands justice, she means revenge." A pupil here interposed, and asked the master if this was not equally true of men, and the answer was, "I accept the amendment

—it certainly is true of all men I ever saw in court-rooms." "Does death end all?" "No," said Kant, "there is the litigation over the estate."

Kant's constant reiteration that he had no use for doctors, lawyers and preachers, we can well imagine did not add to his popularity. As for his reasoning concerning lawyers, we can all, probably, recall a few jug-shaped attorneys who fill the Kant requirements—takers of contingent fees and stirrers up of strife, men who watch for vessels on the rocks and lure with false lights the mariner to his doom. But matters since Kant's day have changed considerably for the better. There is a demand now for a lawyer who is a business man and who will keep people out of trouble instead of getting them in. And we also have a few physicians who are big enough to tell a man there is nothing the matter with him, if they think so, and then charge him accordingly—in inverse ratio to the amount of medicine administered.

And while we no longer refer to the clergyman as our spiritual adviser, excepting in way of pleasantry, he surely is useful as a social promoter.

THE parents of Kant were Lutherans—punctilious and pious. They were descended from Scotch soldiers who had come over here two hundred years before and settled down after the war, just as the Hessians settled down and went to farm-

ing in Pennsylvania, their descendants occasionally becoming Daughters of the Revolution, because their grandsires fought with Washington.

This Scotch strain gave a sturdy bias to the Kants—these Lutherans were really rebels, and as every one knows, there are only two ways of dealing with a religious Scotchman—agree with him or kill him.

Most people said that Kant was supremely stubborn—he himself called it "firmness in the right." Once when a couple of calumniators were thinking up all the bad things they could say about him, one of them exclaimed, "He is n't five feet high!"

"Liar!" came the shrill voice of the Philosopher, who had accidently overheard them, "Liar! I am exactly five feet!" And he drew himself up, and struck his staff proudly and defiantly on the ground.

Which reminds one of the story told of Professor Josiah Royce, who once rang up six fares on the register when he wished to stop a Boston street-car. When the conductor protested, the philosopher called him "upstart," "curmudgeon" and "nincompoop," & showed the fallacy of his claim that thirty cents had been lost, since nobody had found it. Moreover, he offered to prove his proposition by algebraic equation, if one of the gentlemen present had chalk and blackboard on his person.

¶ Once Kant was looking at the flowers in a beautiful garden. But instead of looking through the iron pickets, he stooped over and was squinting through the keyhole of the lock. A student coming along asked him

why he did n't look through the pickets and thus get a perfect view. "Go on, you fool," was the stern reply, "I am studying the law of optics—the unobstructed vision reveals too much—the vivid view is only gotten through a small aperture."

All of which was believed to be a sudden inspiration in way of reply that came to the great professor when caught doing an absent-minded thing. That Kant was not above a little pious prevarication is shown by a story he himself tells. He was never inside of a church once during the last fifty years of his life. But when he became Chancellor of the University, one of his duties was to lead a procession to the Cathedral where certain formal religious services were held. Kant tried to have the exercises in a hall, but failing in this, he did his duty, and marched like a pigmy drum-major at the head of the cavalcade. "Now he will have to go in," the scoffers said.

But he did n't. Arriving at the church door, he excused himself, pleading an urgent necessity, walked around to the back of the church, sacrificed, like Diogenes, to all the gods at once, and made off for home, quietly chuckling to himself at the thought of how he had circumvented the enemy.

Every actor has just so many make-ups and no more. Usually the characters he assumes are variations of a single one. Steele Mackaye used to say, "There are only five distinct dramatic situations." The artist, too, has his properties. And the recognition of this truth

caused Massillon to say: "The great preacher has but one sermon, yet out of this he makes many—by giving portions of it backwards, or beginning in the middle and working both ways, or presenting patchwork pieces, tinted and colored by his mood." All public speakers have canned goods they fall back upon when the fresh fruit of thought grows scarce.

The literary man also has his puppets, pet phrases, and situations to his liking. Victor Hugo always catches the attention by a blind girl, a hunchback, a hunted convict or some mutilated and maimed unfortunate.

¶ In his lectures, Kant used to please the boys by such phrases as this: "I dearly love the muse, although I must admit that I have never been the recipient of any of her favors." This took so well that later he was encouraged to say: "The Old Metaphysics is positively unattractive, but the New Metaphysics is to me most lovely, although I cannot boast that I have ever been honored by any of her favors."

A large audience caused Kant to lose his poise—he became self-conscious, but in his own little lecture-room, with a dozen, or fifty at the most (because this was the capacity of the room) he was charming. He would fix his eye on a single boy, and often upon a single button on this boy's coat, and forgetting the immediate theme in hand, would ramble into an amusing and most instructive monologue of criticism concerning politics, pedagogy or current events. In his writing he was exact, heavy and complex, but in these heart-to-

heart talks, Herder, who attended Kant's lectures for five years, says: "The man had a deal of nimble wit, and here Kant was at his best." So we have two different men—the man who wrote the "Critique," and the man who gave the lectures and clarified his thought by explaining things to others. It was in the lectures that he threw off this: "Men are creatures that cannot do without their kind, yet are sure to quarrel when together." This took fairly well, and later he said: "Men cannot do without men, yet they hate each other when together." And in a year after, comes this: "A man is miserable without a wife, and is seldom happy after he gets one." No doubt this caused a shout of applause from the students, college boys being always on the lookout for just such things; and coming from a very confirmed old bachelor it was peculiarly fetching.

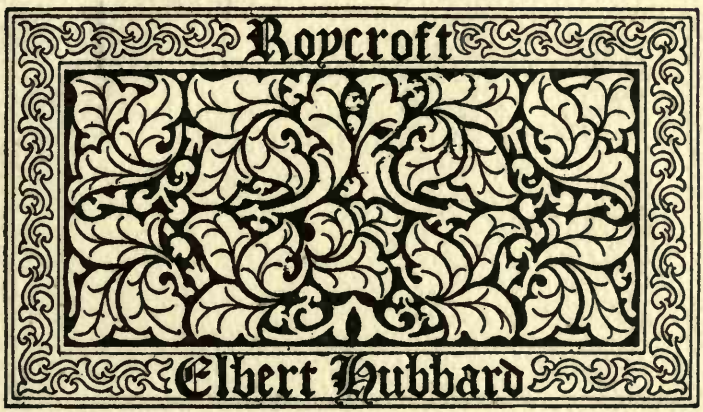
To say that Kant was devoid of wit, as many writers do, is not to know the man. About a year after the "Critique of Pure Reason" appeared, he wrote this: "I am obliged to the learned public for the silence with which it has honored my book, as this silence means a suspension of judgment and a wise determination not to voice a premature opinion." He knew perfectly well that the "learned public" had not read his book, and moreover, could not, intelligently, and the silence betokened simply a stupid lack of interest. Moreover, he knew there was no such thing as a learned public. Kant's remark reveals a keen wit and it also reveals something more—the pique of the unappreciated author

who declares he does n't care what the public thinks of him, and thereby reveals the fact that he does.

Here are a couple of remarks that could only have been made in the reign of Frederick the Great, and under the spell of a college lecture: "The statement that man is the noblest work of God was never made by anybody but man, and must therefore be taken 'cum granum salis.'" "We are told that God said He made man in His own image, but the remark was probably ironical."

¶ Schopenhauer says: "The chief jewel in the crown of Frederick the Great is Immanuel Kant. Such a man as Kant could not have held a salaried position under any other monarch on the globe at that time and have expressed the things that Kant did. A little earlier or a little later, and there would have been no such person as Immanuel Kant. Rulers are seldom big men, but if they are big enough to recognize and encourage big men, they deserve the gratitude of mankind!"

HERE ENDETH THE LITTLE JOURNEY TO THE HOME OF IMMANUEL KANT, WRITTEN BY ELBERT HUBBARD. THE BORDERS AND INITIALS BEING DESIGNED BY ROYCROFT ARTISTS, PORTRAIT BY OTTO J. SCHNEIDER AND THE WHOLE DONE INTO A PRINTED BOOK BY THE ROYCROFTERS AT THEIR SHOP IN EAST AURORA, ERIE COUNTY, NEW YORK, JULY OF THE YEAR MCMIV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